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Public Information: Virginija Morgan,  
ph.: 259-76-12

Email: [vmorgan@usaid.gov](mailto:vmorgan@usaid.gov)

<http://centralasia.usaid.gov>

## PRESS RELEASE

### **USAID Provides Training to Health Specialists on Infection Control and Blood Safety**

Ten specialists from health facilities in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast and the Ministry of Health participated in "Infection control and Blood Safety" study tour in the U.S. from August 1-21, 2007. The tour was organized by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Community Connections Program.

The program was designed to provide support to the Government of Kazakhstan's efforts to improve infection control procedures in Southern Kazakhstan following the 2006 HIV outbreak in Shymkent.

During their three weeks in the US, program participants observed blood transfusion processes in medical settings and discussed various systems for promoting infection control management with infection control and blood safety experts. Kazakhstani specialists visited the American Red Cross, New York City Blood Bank, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health HIV-AIDS Bureau, local NGOs. They learned how these and other organizations deal with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and blood transfusions. Participants also were introduced to government and non-profit organizations' policies and regulations that support and improve infection control systems.

Alexandr Rozhkov, chief doctor of the transfusions department at the South Kazakhstan Oblast Clinical Hospital, was impressed how people feel obliged to help others and donate blood voluntarily and free of charge. Meanwhile, Ainura Mailibayeva, senior physician at the Oblast Prenatal Center in Shymkent, noticed the absence of a stigma towards people living with HIV in the US: "I would like introduce such approach to work with HIV-infected here in Kazakhstan." All program participants were interested in further collaboration and information exchange with the organizations they visited in the US.

Technical aspects of the program were complimented by a cultural program including visits to Boston area museums, a tour of the New York City, and home stays with American families. Participants agreed that interaction with host families was a very memorable and enjoyable aspect of the program, with initial language and cultural barriers quickly overcome.

The Community Connections Program is one of the many projects and initiatives supported by the American people through USAID in Kazakhstan. The program provides an important opportunity for citizens of the United States and Kazakhstan to work together to address common professional challenges while expanding their social and cultural understanding.

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Since 1992 the American people, through USAID have provided more than \$500 million in assistance for the country's economic sector, healthcare system, and democratic institutions.